

3 Haley Road
Bozeman, MT 59715
December 12, 2006

Max Baucus
222 N. 32nd St.
Suite 100
Billings, MT 59101

Dear Max,

You may remember me as Barbara (Holland), a cheerleader for the "Bengals" and a 1958 graduate of **Helena High**. Of course we all remember you and are so proud of your career in looking out for the people in Montana and our nation.

My family were early pioneers in Sweet Grass County and I inherited the summer mountain pasture, which I have combined with my cousin's cattle business for the last 40 years. It has always been my purpose to keep most of it for the next generations, I love my land, just like I love the Rocky Mountain Front, which I thank you for saving. In feeling I had a very special place, I took Forest Stewardship Classes, and partook in Weed Eradication programs and cut down grazing during drought. In other words I am mindful of the environment.

In 1994 the "**Black Butte Fire**" came from the **National Forest** and burned 330,000,000 board feet of my timber, leaving bare ground for Leafy Spurge to move in. Having just healed up from that catastrophe, in August and September, 2006, the "**Derby Mountain Fire**" came from the **National Forest** and hit about 1100 acres and burned about 550,000,000 board feet of timber on my property. As you might know, the value of burned timber is eaten up by the cost of **cleanup, so I lost part of my retirement security, not to mention my land value**. I am single now and have a modest income, so at my age, the loss is great.

In neither fire was an effort on the ground to keep my land safe by the Incident Command. In fact, they told me five days before the fire came close to my acreage they were going to backburn my place. For five days I begged them if the fire hit my 1 1/2 mile border with the National Forest not to back burn, but just let the fire come down in a mosaic until it hit a bulldozed line and then backburn (if they must) on the prairie land up to the line. They finally agreed. They also had 5 days to buffer my property from the National Forest and said they would. But they did not. The only help I had was for an old homestead cabin and that was protected by the Big Timber Fire Department.

In all cases, they lied and back burned my property on three sides, and let the fire come down from the National Forest. The natural fire did less damage than the backburn. When some of my trees did not burn, because of my bulldozer lines, they shot fire rockets into them in front of my son and said, "Let's fire this thing up and get over to the Boulder". (The Boulder was where the trophy homes were and were separated from my property by prairie, a highway, a burned out mountain, cliffs and acres of irrigated fields.) (Big Timber was 14 miles away, with huge cliffs and eaten down prairie pasture and no trees in between, so it was safe.

When private contractor Fire Fighters from different parts of the country refer to a landowners land as "this thing" out of ignorance or boredom, or maybe shame and laziness, I think, this is only second to the Fema response for Katrina. The cost for this 208,198 acre fire was \$21,500,000 million and the rain put it out. I don't feel I got my money's worth, nor did the USA.

I put in and paid for my own bulldozer lines and outfitted my own water truck, while the Incident Command sat idly by with 11 dozers, 87 engines, 9 helicopters, and 1007 Incident Command personnel, which I was paying for with my tax dollars. They did do some retardant on the National Forest, but not on my property.

The Incident Command maps I saw were white with circles (the circles meant to burn all the vegetation as this is the containment line.) They also had black dots to show structures, no geological formations or creeks, no Aerial maps, or landowner maps and **instead of people and structures first, their actions were people and structures ONLY and let the ranchers and small forest owners fend for themselves.**

I'm glad that homes are saved, but the insurance companies make sure of that. Ranchers can't get fire insurance on trees, fences, and Montana Beauty. If I would have put a cabin on every hill top, Incident Command would have probably saved my whole ranch!

Over 300 families were burned by the "Derby Mountain" fire. Twenty-six home homes, 123,495 acres of private land, {60% of the 207,115 acre total}. The following are some of the estimated costs born by the private landowners: 945 miles of private fence (\$9,000,000), \$573,084 cost of deferred grazing, cost of re-seeding erosive slopes \$19.80/ acre, cost of invasive weeds \$34.00-\$125.00/acre.

I personally lost about 5 miles of fence, among other things , some of which could have been saved, except for the backburning.

The loss of natural habitat, beauty, recreation, hunting, fishing, ecosystems, and tranquillity are immeasurable, not only for the private landowners, but for everyone who enjoyed the forest. Besides this, many counties in Montana were breathing smoke for over a month and could only see the Mountains through the haze. You would think the environmentalist would have complained about this, but, not a word.

In October, we were told that the different farm programs, and the Forest Service would help us. It is now mid-December and we haven't heard anything. If we are to defer our pastures, and put in practices to defer floods and erosion, and re-build fences, time is running out before next spring.

These fires were "Montana's Katrina" and we ranchers are also a minority. Please speak for us.

I have always thought of myself as being on the side of the environment. But if the Democrats want to get the votes of the ranchers, they are going to have to turn down this goofy idea that the National Forests do not have to be managed. Some thinning, clear-cuts, roads, helicopter and fire-fighter clearings, must take place on the National Forest, or the environmentalists won't have any green trees to fight over. It is not fair to burn down private property, ruin ecosystems, and harm wildlife because the forest is not managed correctly. Logging, thinning, and road building can be done in an environmentally friendly way.

I hate to see America's natural resources wasted. We aren't that rich!! I often think of the poor women in Darfur and other places who walk for miles for a few sticks to start a fire for their children. The burned timber is still good under the bark, why not load up some shiploads and send it where it can help humanity?

Sincerely,


Barbara Boylan (nee) Holland

August 27, 2001

USDA Forest Service CAT
Attention: Roadless ANPR Comments
P.O. Box 221090
Salt Lake City, Utah 84122

Dear Sirs: .

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE AND LOSS BECAUSE OF FIRE ON NATIONAL FOREST

I am an owner of land adjoining the Gallatin National Forest. In 1994 over half (about 1200 ac.) of my ranch was burned by fires sweeping from the Federal Land (The Black Butte Fire in Sweetgrass County, Montana). It was disappointing and disastrous that when the fire was just starting the local Big Timber Volunteer Fire Dept. were able to drive to the fire and could have put it out, but were ordered not to, as it was on federal land and there was a liability issue. As a result, because of a slow response, by the federal government, and firefighters who did not know which township they were in, and abandonment of the initial fire with no safety net of a hand or machine line, (all the crew left to save a barn.) The wind changed, and 11,000 acres burned, mostly private land.

The above explanation is to show that roads and quick response, even if it means deputizing local forest fighters could save private property.

The only help from the Federal Government was small cost share on fence fixing and grass seeding. The clean-up of the burned timber, sale of burned timber (at a loss), and the cost of fighting weeds (leafy spurge) which replaced the native ground cover, was left to the land owner. My income from the land is 3500/yr. and most of the income has been used to clean up the fire damage for 6 yr..

I do have some green timber left. Because of the rough terrain, I would have to enter the forest for perhaps 100 yds to reach a point where I could come back into my property in order to harvest the trees. I think permission should be given to private forest owners, to do this.

I believe the national forest should have roads and permission to build roads in order to protect private property from future fires. The national forests should continue to have logging and thinning activities. The logging companies should be held to stricter standards for clean-up to preserve aesthetics. AND LEAVE LESS SLASH TO SLOW DOWN FUTURE FIRES Some clearcuts, which are properly cleaned up, grassed and re-planted are better habitat than trees growing so thick that there is no grass, and only small diameter trees. The edge of the forest is where the animals like to be. Selective clear-cutting around private land would be a good fire control, if properly cleaned up. after logging.

1. The appropriate role of forest planning belongs to locals, who know more about recreation needs and roads needed to control fire. The local forester knows when trees have reached maturity and need to be cut or thinned, or if prescribed burning needs to be done.

2. The best way for the Forest Service to work with others is through local meetings at least twice a year which are widely advertised.

3. Forest officials should have maps of logging roads and other roads now in place and use this as a grid for preventing forest fires, and managing the forest. Certain roads should be for multiple use by the public, and a yearly fee should be paid for weed management uses.

4. The local community needs to be protected by clear cutting and complete clean up on forest boundaries, so that fire barriers are in place before a fire ever starts.

5. There should be roads already to private lands inside roadless areas. Roads which are in place should be open for use, if they have a history of use.

6. The values to evaluate roadless, are :

1. does this create fire danger?
2. does this impede forest management?
3. does this endanger neighboring private property?
4. can the elderly, the poor, the handicapped, have access to the forest?
5. Is there multiple use in this area, or is this only accessible to outfitters?

7. The activities which should not be allowed in areas where there is not a road is cutting across the country and making a new road, by ATVs. The fine would be for the perpetrator to pay for grass seeding and weed spraying of the area which is disrupted. Only roads agreed on by locals and forest officials can be used by the public. The others can be kept clear of falling logs, so they provide a slow-down for fires, and also provide an access for forest officials for forest management and access to fires.

8. The roadless areas should definitely not be designated wilderness. Only the young and the rich can enjoy the wilderness, leave the forests for the elderly and the poor to enjoy. Every coolie and creek does not have to be accessed, but there should be some areas for every type of user.

9. The first objective of the Forest Service is forest health, (which includes harvesting, thinning, and prescribed burning, which will cut down on forest fires, so there will be a forest to enjoy. The second objective is to provide recreation for all citizens. In providing recreation, safety and law enforcement must be addressed. Perhaps a branch of the armed service could be used to provide manpower, which the Forest Service may lack.

Now that there is a tariff on Canadian timber, perhaps we won't have below cost timber sales, and our National Forests can make money by harvesting timber and use the money for weed spray, local fire control, and multiple use management.

10. There is no need for roadless areas. Roads caused by Timber harvest, can be designated open or closed, and can be grassed in if closed.

Sincerely,

Barbara Boylan
3 Halcy Rd.
Bozeman, MT. 59715

(Private Forest Owner Sweetgrass County)

Heisel, Leanne

From: Scott & Kathy Wiley [wiley@wb.midrivers.com]
Sent: Thursday, January 31, 2008 1:27 PM
To: Heisel, Leanne
Subject: Fire Suppression Committee.doc

January 30, 2008

Fire Suppression Committee
C/o Leanne Heisel; Legislative Services Division
P.O. Box 201706
Helena, Montana 59620-1706

Dear Ms. Heisel:

As a landowner affected by wildfires nearly every year, I would like to make a few comments in regards to wildfire management.

1: We need to have more local involvement in decisions made by management teams. We as stewards of this land know the terrain, know the area, where roads are, so we are capable of making some decisions without someone from another state telling us where and what to do. No one knows a ranch better than the rancher.

2: We need to relax some of the rules. Firefighter safety is of major importance and a great concern but, anyone who has ever fought a rangeland fire knows that more progress can be made in the night when winds die down and humidity rises. Having to work in daylight hours only makes it harder to control fires.

3: More effort needs to be placed on putting fires out, not just structure protection. The grass and rangeland is our lively hood, without grass ranchers cannot survive. These management teams need to understand this. Private rangeland is not the same as a Wilderness Area and the let it burn policy should be left in Washington D.C.

4: More effort should be made to allow local volunteer firefighters to do what they are trained to do, put fires out. Contracted crews get paid for the time they are there on a fire, not for putting the fire out, therefore they have little interest in saving a ranchers grassland, the longer the fire burns the more they get paid.

I come by these comments from experience fighting fires, not by choice, from having to. I have worked with some great teams from DNRC as well as some of the most arrogant know it alls employed by this state. Case in point, I spent an entire night building a fire line with my dozer on a neighboring ranch. The next morning when the DNRC crews started showing up, I was greeted by a crew boss who stopped me and shook my hand. He could not believe that someone could build a fire line like that in the night. Ten minutes later, I got yelled at by another DNRC crew chief because I made the fire line go through a gate instead of tearing out this ranchers fence and left about 2 acres of unburned ground inside the fire line.

Thank you for considering my comments,

1/31/2008

Heisel, Leanne

From: Aubyn Curtiss [aubyna@interbel.net]
Sent: Thursday, January 31, 2008 3:51 PM
To: Heisel, Leanne
Subject: Letter to Fire Committee

**Interim Legislative Fire Suppression Committee
January 30, 2008 Solicited Comment**

Members & Interested Persons:

Lincoln County is my home and apart from times away for schooling at UCLA and a brief time following job opportunity in Alaska, almost all my adult life I have been privileged to live adjacent to the Kootenai National Forest. My husband before his disability retirement, served as fire control officer on the Murphy Lake District on the Kootenai, and because of his dedication to his job, our family life during fire seasons revolved 24 hours a day around fires and fire suppression. Early on we learned that early response determines the size and eventual cost of any fire. That is reality.

In recent years too many fires, because of federal policies, including let burn policies, and locked gates restricting access when fires were small, have been allowed to grow until virtually uncontrollable. I have communicated with some of the committee members before, but want to reiterate and emphasize the fact that Montana needs to re-examine any existing memorandums of understanding with the federal agencies to ascertain that policy differences will no longer contribute to excessive suppression costs. There must be an assumption that liability must be assessed when bad policy decisions of agency personnel allow fires to grow to catastrophic size, increase the costs of suppression and endanger the public.

Before leaving the regular session this year I requested information on the origin of fires and associated costs. I have a report from the fiscal analyst's office, which though incomplete, indicates that cost of fires originating on federally managed lands in Montana is costing the state millions of dollars annually. In the four year period reported, the chart details costs in excess of 61 million dollars on these

Specific fires, alone. If cost statistics are now available, the committee should examine carefully the cost to Montana of federal "let burn" policy fires which start in wilderness or on federal property and wreak destruction in their paths when burning their way on to private or state owned property.

In 2007 two fires in the Bob Marshall, though reported in early July, were permitted to burn unrestrained until one had jumped boundaries on the Front, caused evacuations of property owners, and escalated the costs of fighting them to in excess of 20 million dollars. I have not seen the final statistics as yet although my request should be on record, and I am still interested in seeing the final report.

It is past time for federal policy makers to examine their own definitions of "Wild Land Fire Use"

and the new term “fire use fires” to determine their worth in the overall scheme of things. It is time for them to not only count the cost, but also face related liability when use of fire as a tool results in out of control fires spreading to other jurisdictions.

Another concern is that of public safety and perhaps that should be added to our constitutional protection of a guaranteed clean and healthy environment. I want to make two points, here. One is the need to place the safety of citizens and fire fighters as our highest priority. That means when a decision is pending, human safety and property protection must be placed ahead of alleged endangered species considerations. We must not allow a reenactment of the Washington state tragedy in Montana. Our firefighters should be held blameless and be given immunity to prosecution in any takings assessed by federal agencies, relative to alleged infractions of federal law or administrative rules. Decisions should always reflect the safety and well-being of Montanans. Inasmuch as the Department of Natural Resources has set in motion a plan on state lands to protect itself from “unintended takings,” I can think of no more fitting application for claiming that immunity. It will be costing us a lot.

It is important that the committee should also be sensitive to resource utilization as a way of defraying costs, as they view the challenge of dealing with the small dimension and ladder fuels components of the massive fuel build-up which is of grave concern to us all. Pilot projects and studies done indicate there are better ways than fire to rid ourselves of these materials and new economics offer ways to replace negative returns from thinning costs, to a positive investment offering monetary returns. Current drought conditions alerting us to more consciousness of better protecting our water sheds should be a strong deterrent to solving problems with fire, only to be faced with erosion and water shortages caused by fire. I strongly urge the committee to investigate methodology to make possible the utilization of the harvested wood fiber as a renewable and non-polluting fuel source with economic benefits to rural communities. New options surface as on-going research is making available even newer technology.

Many resources are available to facilitate compliance with the recommendations of the July 07 Legislative Audit recommendations relative to “Promoting Proper Forest Practices” and “Prioritizing Forest Fuels Reduction Projects.” I strongly recommend that members access the College of Forest Resources website to acquaint themselves with facts and figures which prove that utilization of the excess fuel waste is a far more cost effective way to go in the long term than what has been acceptable practice. This web site reflects cooperation between the College of Forest Resources at the University of Washington, Washington State University and USDA State and Private Forestry efforts. ruraltech.org offers invaluable information on what is being done and the potential to be achieved by availing forest managers of the best technology. Click on RTI Fact Sheets and review Fact Sheets 10 and 28. You may be surprised.

Continued use of fire and tolerance of “let burn” policies, in light of the recent race to control carbon emissions, certainly raises the question of double standards being observed in setting state fire policy. Information provided from a California pollution study reported amazing statistics relative to catastrophic fire emissions. Information collected from a model developed by the California Air-Resource Board Department to estimate emissions from forest fires indicated “burning one acre of coniferous forest emits on average 9 tons of CO, 0.6 tons of hydrocarbon particulates, 0.25 tons of nitrous oxide.” It was calculated that it would take 1040 new cars driving 1250 miles (an average for one month of driving) to equal a one acre fire. In 2003, about 500,000 acres burned in Flathead County. From that model we can only guess at the volume of contaminants which were, and still are being released upon an increasingly angry Montana public.

There is no way to assess the monetary cost accrued because of environmental damage,

watershed devastation, wildlife casualties, charred timber and rendering forests susceptible to insect infestation. Montana can, and must do much better!

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

Aubyn Curtiss, SD 1

Heisel, Leanne

From: Marsha WALISER [mwaliser2292@msn.com]
Sent: Thursday, January 31, 2008 3:50 PM
To: Heisel, Leanne
Subject: Fire Suppression Interim Committee Comments
Attachments: Fire Suppression Interim Committee.doc

Dear Leanne Heisel,
Attached you will find our comments on the fires in Montana and forest management.
Thank you for you time,
Jim and Marsha Waliser

1/31/2008

Fire Suppression Interim Committee
c/o Leanne Heisel,
Legislative Services Division
P.O. Box 201706
Helena, MT 59620-1706

Dear Committee Members,

I am a Native Montana who has seen what the lack of forest management practices has done to our local and state economies and what said lack of management has cost the public in fire fighting cost. Not only has the lack of timber harvest hurt the loggers but it also hurts the local county governments and schools causing a huge economic impact. It has also hurt the rural communities due to the reduction in hunting, fishing and other recreational opportunities during and after a fire. The health issues from all the smoke and ash have yet to be determined but as far as I am concerned it has hurt me and everyone else who has had to live in the smoke of the last few fire years.

In the past the fires were fought the hardest at the first and during the night when the winds were down and the humidity was up, now the "let it burn" policy is doing irreparable damage to our health, the wildlife, the streams, our clean water, our quantity of water and many other issues. The blackened forest are not a place visitors want to go, the wildlife habitat is destroyed for many years and the snow melts at a faster pace causing erosion and less water for the plants later in the spring and summer, it also creates less water for the irrigation season so less crops produced again lowering and hurting the economy.

During and after the fires of the last few years as you talk to people on the "lines" or in the camps you can see why the fires are costing so much and why they burn so long. I talked to some people that were called in from Arizona on the 2000 fires, they spent two weeks fishing and recreating in Montana on the governments money and never even came close to the fire. The amount of personal in the camps and the amount of unnecessary equipment or over anticipated supplies are overwhelming.

I feel if the landowner has not "fire proofed" his property we the taxpayer should not have to pay to protect it. I also think that the policy of closing and "obliterating" the roads on state and federal lands will lead to less access to fight the fires and is costing us the taxpayers money that would be better spent managing and maintaining our forest. It also affects the wildlife and causes more erosion than letting Mother Nature reclaim the road. The myth that it will take mother nature hundreds of years to repair the damage caused by the roads or vehicles is totally false as I have seen roads grow back to be impassable by vehicles in my life time and I am under the age of 60.

We also need to look at managing the forest before and after the fires to help prevent future large fires due to fuel build up. As part of the management maybe implement some sort of cost to the groups that are appealing management of the forest.

Heisel, Leanne

From: Scott & Kathy Wiley [wiley@wb.midrivers.com]
Sent: Thursday, January 31, 2008 1:27 PM
To: Heisel, Leanne
Subject: Fire Suppression Committee.doc

January 30, 2008

Fire Suppression Committee
C/o Leanne Heisel; Legislative Services Division
P.O. Box 201706
Helena, Montana 59620-1706

Dear Ms. Heisel:

As a landowner affected by wildfires nearly every year, I would like to make a few comments in regards to wildfire management.

1: We need to have more local involvement in decisions made by management teams. We as stewards of this land know the terrain, know the area, where roads are, so we are capable of making some decisions without someone from another state telling us where and what to do. No one knows a ranch better than the rancher.

2: We need to relax some of the rules. Firefighter safety is of major importance and a great concern but, anyone who has ever fought a rangeland fire knows that more progress can be made in the night when winds die down and humidity rises. Having to work in daylight hours only makes it harder to control fires.

3: More effort needs to be placed on putting fires out, not just structure protection. The grass and rangeland is our lively hood, without grass ranchers cannot survive. These management teams need to understand this. Private rangeland is not the same as a Wilderness Area and the let it burn policy should be left in Washington D.C.

4: More effort should be made to allow local volunteer firefighters to do what they are trained to do, put fires out. Contracted crews get paid for the time they are there on a fire, not for putting the fire out, therefore they have little interest in saving a ranchers grassland, the longer the fire burns the more they get paid.

I come by these comments from experience fighting fires, not by choice, from having to. I have worked with some great teams from DNRC as well as some of the most arrogant know it alls employed by this state. Case in point, I spent an entire night building a fire line with my dozer on a neighboring ranch. The next morning when the DNRC crews started showing up, I was greeted by a crew boss who stopped me and shook my hand. He could not believe that someone could build a fire line like that in the night. Ten minutes later, I got yelled at by another DNRC crew chief because I made the fire line go through a gate instead of tearing out this ranchers fence and left about 2 acres of unburned ground inside the fire line.

Thank you for considering my comments,

1/31/2008

Heisel, Leanne

From: Charles Woolley [wildnwoolley@blackfoot.net]
Sent: Thursday, January 31, 2008 10:01 AM
To: Heisel, Leanne
Subject: Fire Suppression Committee

Fire Suppression Committee
c/o Leanne Heisel
Legislative Services Division

Dear Committee Members;

My husband and I live in northwest Montana, about nine miles north of the town of Plains. We have been tree farming our property since 1981 and share a long border with the State.

We have been active in the "wildfire" issue on several fronts. I have served as a community representative to encourage local folks to make their properties more fire safe, have performed the fuels reduction work on two neighbor's properties, have provided education and leadership to this end; and have worked as a fire lookout. My husband has worked for a private contractor for the past two seasons and besides fighting fires in Montana, has worked in Oregon and Minnesota.

Living in the woods for the past 27 years has made us very aware of the potential for losing everything to wildfire so we have done extensive fuels reduction work on our property, have created fire breaks and have purchased and installed a 12,000 gallon water tank that can be used by the state and rural fire agencies.

Fires are here to stay. Fire fighting costs money.

It is a simple matter that when environmentalists rule what is allowed to be done in our forests - state, federal or otherwise - then we lose. We lose out on jobs and thus, a tax base; we lose another generation of people who know how to work in the woods and thus, have less equipment and mills to process timber; we allow more fuel to build up, thus allowing fires to become more monstrous as each season passes; thus we all have to face more seasons of breathing smoke and chewing air, thus, we have to expect long-term impacts on our health. This cycle must be stopped.

I know the state is looking for more revenue that will be "earmarked" for funding firefighting costs. Perhaps the myriad environmental organizations can be taxed or countersued. For every lawsuit they file, they must be held responsible for the cost of the loss of jobs and the loss of timber sales or timber value; I'm sure these costs can be quantified. This would dampen their unrestrained and irresponsible court filings.

Being a housewife I am always looking for more careful ways to spend the money we have to spend. Perhaps the state needs to do this as well. Should the state hire more seasonal workers instead of hiring private contractors during severity? I don't know but I'm sure someone can figure it out. You would have to total the costs associated with the hiring, outfitting, training, trucks, insurance and fuel for seasonal state workers; plus benefits and end-of-season unemployment so that this cost could be compared to that associated with hiring a private crew that provides its own equipment, training and insurance which does not cost anything in the off-season.

Perhaps the state should revisit the contracts made with the seasonal workers. A private contractor pays a set amount per 24 hours, during which an employee can be called at any time to work and is generally expected to work up to 16 hours of that time. Absolutely no alcohol consumption is allowed during those 24 hours (times x number of days); and during the times when fire activity does not call upon their services, they are oftentimes offered the opportunity to participate in some other work such as a thinning job. This means more bang for the buck.

1/31/2008

Currently, those who are employed by the state specifically for severity, unless actively on a fire, produce little-to-nothing during the time they are drawing wages from the state. And I am aware of a number of cases when that time has been used to recuperate (read: sleep) from the previous night's partying. Private contractors and their employees, from my experience and that of my husband's, do not tolerate any alcohol consumption or hung-over conditions. The state can do better than it currently does in the utilization of this portion of the budget.

On the ground, those who actually manage fire teams must have the ability to oversee, and ultimately be responsible, for the equipment so there is accountability. I have heard a couple comments of outright theft of equipment. Likewise, some teams have been reported to do little to nothing in the field – they should be fired! How obscure is that if one wants to have efficiency in use of financial resources?

We are aware that private property, and by this I mean citizen-owned private property as opposed to the millions of acres owned by Plum Creek Timber, is triaged for the safety of those assigned to structure protection. I believe every landowner needs to know this to enable them to make an informed decision to be proactive about making their place safer, or not. This would simplify the process for firefighters, reducing time invested in such evaluations and allowing them to be more readily utilized when there is a fire. A system to designate the safe or unsafe condition of a place could be implemented by computer or GPS, I would guess.

While I have a rudimentary idea of the cost of having multiple helicopters available or actively utilized during the fire season, I'm thankful for their presence and quick efficiency in getting to a fire as our country is rugged and few straight roads exist. Their use is invaluable.

I think the state has to be grateful for all the people who are willing to get the training they need, work to stay in shape, and end up working in hellish conditions to fight fires in Montana. This is a new economic base. I would much rather there was more active cutting, thinning and management of our forests going on but barring that, I'm glad some people can still make a portion of their living in the woods around here. It would be a good thing to see the state more actively harvest, thin and manage its timber.

If the scientists can be believed, we will be in for longer and more intense fire seasons. With the popularity of living in Montana, more people will flock here, build in marginal areas and put more pressure on the fire fighting system but they do provide more revenue through property taxes. I DO NOT favor an additional tax on landowners for fire fighting costs as I believe the costs, which in turn become salaries, of the firefighters and firefighting benefit everyone in the state; certainly much more so than supporting those who live in Section 8 housing for example!

Personally, I feel our tax burden is heavy enough, especially with the skyrocketing costs of everything else under the sun. Like those of us who work hard not to live in debt, the state will have to find ways to wring more out of the current budget. I have offered a couple suggestions on how to do that.

I hope you receive lots of varied input and that they will not all be boiled down to just putting more tax burden on the shoulders of landowners. I would love to see more of that shouldered by those who prevent good forest management practices from taking place in our beautiful country.

Best of luck to you all,
Sincerely,

Judy Woolley
424 High Country Road
Plains, Montana 59859

Heisel, Leanne

From: Tami Johnson [taxitami162@yahoo.com]
Sent: Thursday, January 31, 2008 4:14 PM
To: Heisel, Leanne
Subject: Fire Season:-)

We need more people from Montana working and trained in our great state to have fire training. Yes, I have fire training. Money spent on the teams from other states never stays here. Lets keep fire money here.

Build fire boundaries in our national forests and along current roads. Make these barriers wide so that the fire is a natural boundary. The fire brakes will need to be barricaded so the general public can't use the boundaries as access if on public or private lands. Montana needs to build the fire brakes on the off season, currently we are only building fire boundaries during a big fires.
Tami Johnson

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Heisel, Leanne

From: Tye and Raye Anne [lund@midrivers.com]
Sent: Thursday, January 31, 2008 11:32 AM
To: Heisel, Leanne
Subject: Off-road fire travel-state wildfire management

January 23, 2008

I am Tye Lund, a rancher in Winnett, and for 15 years have been the assistant fire chief for the Winnett Volunteer Fire Department which is in Petroleum County. I have worked and watched the state work and operate on fires. The WVFD has 4 state land trucks in our county. They are a great help to us and get used regularly on fires. When they get called to project fires, it sometimes leaves us short. We have a lot of area around Winnett that seem to attract lightening strikes and we are on watch from June until October for fires.

I think one of the best ways to stop a fire is to get there fast while it is still small. The WVFD usually is first on scene and it can be 2 hours or longer before state land or BLM trucks get there. In dry weather that makes a big difference on the size of the fire. When they arrive, it seems to me it takes them a long time before they actually get water on the fire. I understand safety, but speed up the paperwork or do it when the fire is under control.

The private landowner is a big asset to us out here. They haul water to the fire department and haul water to help put out any fires. A number of ranchers and farmers have trucks that will haul water or tanks in the back of pickups. They are willing to haul water if you ask them. A portatank works well in this instance.

A small tractor (40 horse or less) with a loader and back blade can be hauled behind a pickup and can put in a good fire line faster and better than a busload of firefighters with shovels. It is probably cheaper and more efficient also. I know I would rather have ground ploughed up around my buildings and even in my back pastures, than have my entire ranch go up in smoke.

As a landowner, I understand the no off-road travel. I don't want my hayfields and pastures torn up by people driving all over the place, but in an emergency situation like fire, there should be exceptions to the rule. Would you like to have one or two roads or a lot of acres and homes burned up? Which would cost more and take longer to repair and/or replace? Some roads would help later if another fire were to start, and ease everyday work for ranchers getting out to their cattle, or the BLM and Forest Service checking on things. A road might also save someone's life in a medical emergency. We have a lot of hunting area on state and BLM areas and there have been instances where we have had to get to an injured or hurt hunter.

I will be at the Lewistown meeting if you have one there. I look forward to discussing and hearing more comments.

Sincerely,

Tye Lund

1/31/2008

Lund # Ranch, Inc.
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Winnett, MT 59087
406-429-2393

January 31, 2008

TO: Fire Suppression Committee, c/o Leanne Heisel
FR: Bob Decker, The Policy Institute
RE: Input and recommendations (as solicited in 14 December 2007 memo from the Fire Suppression Committee)

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATION: Perform comprehensive research on fire suppression costs for structure protection to provide a full picture of that aspect of wildland fire management and enable the Fire Suppression Committee to assign financial, tax, and budget responsibilities fairly among affected and benefited parties associated with fire management and suppression.

RATIONALE: The issue of defending structures in firefighting efforts has become central in the public dialogue about fire suppression. The issue envelops questions such as:

- How much does the public pay to protect private structures in the public's firefighting efforts?
- How do demands for funds, human resources, equipment, and firefighter training differ for structure protection (as opposed to natural resource protection)?
- What are the current trends in costs - relative and absolute - for structure protection?
- What are the projected changes in the number of structures vulnerable to wildland fire, i.e., the projected changes in and character of the Wildland-Urban Interface?
- Who should be responsible for defending structures?
- Who should pay the costs of structure protection?
- Does use of the state's general fund to pay structure protection costs reflect tax accountability in the state budget?
- What policies and tax structures have other states and public entities developed to address structure protection and accountability in budget and taxation?

These questions and the issue of structure defense costs and requirements are relevant to at least three of the four subjects of investigation assigned to the Fire Suppression Committee by the Legislature and HB 1 of the September special session: "the efficient use of fire suppression resources" (subject of investigation no. 2 in the Committee's 14 December 2007 memo); "impacts on operations on private land and the effective use of private resources" (subject no. 3); and "state and federal forest management policies and how those policies may contribute to an increased number of wildfires, greater safety risk to firefighters, or compromised effectiveness of fire suppression efforts" (subject no. 3).

Some research on structure defense costs has already been done and presented to the Committee, but it may not be sufficient as questions about accountability become more pointed, specific changes in accountability are offered, and debate about accountability intensifies. In the end, the best statutes - and fairest assignment of accountability - will be based on research that is credible and sufficient in scope to justify high-quality debate and meaningful change.

The Fire Suppression Committee can elevate the quality of its work and set the stage for the fairest possible answers to the questions posed above by asking for and considering as much factual data and research that can be gained with the budget and staff resources available to the Committee.

Thank you.